the capital of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla was taken and a building was also hired for the said purpose;

(c) if so, the details thereof and by when a passport office would be established therein; and

(d) if not, the reasons for not establishing a passport office in States' headquarter itself to relieve the people of the State from the problems being faced by them due to frequent visits of Chandigarh for passport related affairs?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED). (a) Passport Offices have not been opened in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttaranchal.

(b) There is a decision to open a Passport Office in Shimala where a Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC) is already located. A building to house the proposed passport office was shortlisted but was never hired.

(c) and (d) Due to human resource and other constraints, at present the Government is not in a position to open more Passport Offices, including at Shimla. However, with a view to taking the passport services closer to the public, a Decentralisation Scheme has been introduced under which the applicants can submit the passport applications at the district level in the District Passport Cells (DPCs) set up in the office of District Magistrate or Superintendent of Police, and thus do not have to travel long distances for that purpose. The DPCs are already functional in 25 States, including Himachal Pradesh.

Issuance of Passport with a Seal "Except Pakistan"

†748. SHRI ABU ASIMAZMI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that direction have been issued to the regional Passport Office of Jammu-Kashmir that while giving passport to the Kashmiri youths seal of "Except Pakistan' should be put on it";

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) whether this direction would adversely affect the Indo-Pak relation;

(d) if so, the deficits thereof; and

(e) the policies adopted by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) In September-October, 2004, Passport Office Srinagar issued a few passports valid for all countries except Pakistan. This was done as recommended by the State CID. However, as soon as this was brought to the notice of the Government, Passport Offices in Srinagar and Jammu were instructed to issue passports without any restrictions as was the case earlier.

(c) and (d) Does not arise.

(e) Passports are issued "Valid for all Countries".

Strategic Partnership with USA

749. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India and America would be into a second phase of the Strategic Partnership as appeared in media;

(b) if so, the detailed report on the discussions that took place since this Government came to power; and

(c) if so, how would it improve our relations with USA?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) and (b) Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) seeks to enhance cooperation in civilian space, civilian nuclear energy, 'dual use' items and missile defence areas and is designed to progress through a series of reciprocal steps that build on each other. Since January 2004, the two governments have worked closely to conclude Phase One of the NSSP. This has included implementation of measures to address export control concerns. These efforts have enableed the US to make modifications to US export licensing policies that will foster cooperation in commercial space programmes and permit certain exports to power plants at safeguarded nuclear facilities. ISRO Headquarters has been removed from the Department of Commerce Entity List. The